

Amendments to the Claims:

1. (currently amended) An easy-opening, retortable container comprising:  
a base portion having a bottom and side and defining an interior space and an opening thereto;

a single-layer plastic membrane of sufficient size to cover said opening, said membrane defining first and second sides and having coplanar inner and outer portions, said outer portion being friction welded to said base portion, said inner and outer portions being defined by an annular groove disposed in one of the first and second sides of said membrane; and

a grip portion integral to said plastic membrane, said grip portion being disposed on said second side of said plastic membrane and connected to said inner portion, wherein said grip portion is a circumferentially continuous annular pull ring extending generally in a plane substantially parallel to said plastic membrane; and

wherein said annular groove defines an annular fail portion between said inner and outer portions of said plastic membrane such that said inner portion is structured to be removed from said outer portion by urging said grip portion away from said outer portion, thereby tearing said annular fail portion and opening the container, and wherein said grip portion defines a circle having a diameter which substantially corresponds to a diameter of said annular groove, each of the annular fail portion defined by the annular groove and the diameter defined by the grip portion being centered about a common axis that is coaxial with a central axis of the container.

2. (original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein said base portion is formed of plastic.

3. (cancelled)

4. (original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 3 wherein said grip portion is connected to said inner portion of said plastic membrane by a primary connection portion and at least one secondary connection portion, said at least one secondary connection portion being circumferentially spaced from said primary connection portion and weaker than said primary connection portion such that said at least one secondary connection

portion is configured to break when said grip portion is urged from said inner portion such that said grip portion is hinged by the primary connection portion.

5. (cancelled)

6. (original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein said fail portion has a strength of about 14 pounds or less.

7. (original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein said membrane and said base portion are each formed of a high barrier plastic material to prevent transmission of moisture and oxygen therethrough.

8. (original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein said membrane is formed of polyolefin.

9. (original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein said membrane includes oxygen scavengers disposed in a polyolefin.

10. (previously amended) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein said outer portion of said membrane defines a circumferential ridge extending from said first side of said membrane, said ridge structured to engage said base portion of the container.

Claims 11-27 (cancelled)

28. (previously amended) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 10 wherein said circumferential ridge extends in a continuous circular path from said first side of said outer portion of said membrane, said ridge defining a tapered profile and corresponding in diameter to said side of said base portion, and said ridge being friction welded to said side of said base portion.

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29. (previously amended) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein said grip portion is formed during molding of said plastic membrane such that said grip portion is integral to said plastic membrane.

Claims 30-31 (cancelled)